

Op-ed: When Women Make Progress, Countries Make Progress

On this 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, it is important to recognize that women globally have made significant gains. In Vietnam, we applaud the progress that has been made in several areas. Vietnam has already met the Millennium Development Goal on gender, and the National Assembly boasts the highest ratio of women to men in Southeast Asia.

From the warrior Trung sisters to current leaders like Vietnam Women's Union Director Nguyen Thi Hoa or Madame Truong Thi Mai, whose pioneering legislation will benefit female entrepreneurs and continue to grow the Vietnamese economy, women have long been at the forefront in shaping Vietnamese society. Indeed, it is hardworking female entrepreneurs who have been a critical driver behind Vietnam's explosive economic growth over the last several years.

However, despite the progress, inequalities persist around the world. The potential of women to contribute to economic growth and prosperity, social progress, peace, and good governance is still untapped in too many places.

Gender-based violence not only destroys the lives of individual girls and women, families, and communities, but also robs the world of the talent it urgently needs. The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC), with funding from the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi, is currently implementing a program to combat gender-based violence in Vietnam. The project focuses on strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and justice sectors to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

If we are to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world, we cannot leave half the population behind. We cannot successfully tackle the challenges that confront us in relation to the environment, security, economics, development, and more, if women are not engaged at every level of society.

When women make progress, countries make progress. A mountain of research shows that investments in women correlate positively with alleviating poverty and increasing prosperity. The education of a girl is the most effective development investment that can be made with enormous positive consequences for her future and her family's future.

With this in mind, the U.S. government provided over \$15,000 to support the Anh Duong Community and Development Center's project "Women's Rights and Gender Equality for Women in Rural Areas," which focuses on empowering women in Hau Giang Province by increasing their knowledge about their rights through community education and other trainings in 15 communes. This training will improve the quality of social services women receive by allowing them access to discuss women's rights with lawyers, psychologists and sociologists.

Circumscribing women's participation and leaving their potential untapped, shortchanges women and shortchanges our world. We vitally need women's talents, experiences, and leadership. We are committed to the empowerment of women not just because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is the smart thing to do. Happy International Women's Day – really something to celebrate!

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